

The Inheritance of Ephraim

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, February 18th 2024

I. Introduction to chapters 16-17 - answering a puzzling question

I'm going to preach on the whole of chapter 16 today. And it is going to be an odd sermon, I will admit. But before I even dig into the chapter I want to deal with a puzzling question that at one of you had, and that is, "Why are *both* Ephraim and Manasseh given land? Doesn't that make thirteen tribes?" And yes, you have made a correct observation. And anyone who has thought much about this knows that it's a *puzzling* observation since the Bible only speaks of twelve tribes.

And if you haven't read ahead, let me explain why someone even *had* this question. All of chapters 16-17 are devoted to describing the massive land holdings that were acquired by the tribe of Joseph. Or wait a minute - is it the *tribes* of Joseph? People get confused. These verses *clearly* indicate that Joseph's two sons Manasseh and Ephraim constituted *two separate* tribes, *each* of which got different land inheritance borders. Yet that would make thirteen tribes, wouldn't it?

And I thought that was a good enough question that I should at least give an introduction to these two chapters by answering that question. If one person had that question, perhaps others will have the same question in their minds. Don't worry if it is all confusing. But I do want to at *least* satisfy the curiosity of some. And I should point out that it *does* have practical relevance to us today; we will see that soon. Just to anticipate the conclusion. It helps to illustrate the unity of the body from Genesis to Revelation and the tight connection that the New Testament church has to the Old Testament church - which *is* a hugely practical issue. And on the surface, you might wonder how on earth I would get to that conclusion. But you are Bereans. You can evaluate whether you see it in Scripture or not.

A. Twelve tribes? Or Thirteen tribes? Joseph (v. 1) got a double blessing (Gen. 48-49; cf. Ezek 47:13 - "two portions") and thus "the children of Joseph were two tribes: Manasseh and Ephraim" (cf. 14:4), technically making thirteen tribes. In order for the perfect number of 12 to be maintained, those "two tribes" of Joseph are each designated as being a "half tribe" (Josh 13:8; cf. Numb. 32:33; Deut. 3:13; 29:8; Josh 1:12; 12:6; 13:7,29; etc.) to make one full "tribe of Joseph" (Numb. 13:11; Rev. 7:8).

And we will start with Genesis. In Genesis chapters 48 and 49 God blessed Joseph's two sons *equally* with the *other* brothers of Joseph. In fact, commentators point out that Jacob *adopted* Joseph's two grandsons as if they were his own sons - making thirteen sons (or possibly fourteen, depending on how you count it), but certainly not twelve. But another way of looking at it was that Joseph was given a *double* blessing. Ezekiel 47:13 words the double blessing this way: "Joseph shall have two portions" when the land is divided. If

that's all that was said about Joseph, then it would be a little bit easier to explain. So what's the problem?

Well, commentators point out that Genesis makes it crystal clear that the *reason* God had Jacob adopt both of Joseph's sons was that God intended for Manasseh and Ephraim to be the leaders of two tribes. The Bible refers to the tribe of Ephraim and the tribe of Manasseh 54 times. And both tribes are actually counted over and over as being two of the twelve tribes. *That's* what's confusing. More than 50 passages make it crystal clear that Ephraim and Manasseh constituted their *own* tribes with the twelve. The Bible says so over and over again. For example, Joshua 14:4 says, "For the children of Joseph were two tribes: Manasseh and Ephraim." And *these* two chapters clearly treat them as two separate tribes getting their own separate land inheritance. So that makes thirteen tribes, right?

So why does the Bible *never, ever, ever* speak of thirteen tribes? It *always* speaks of twelve tribes. Some people answer that it was because the tribe of Levi only inherited cities, so they aren't spoken of as a tribe. At first blush, that might seem like a reasonable answer. But that's *not* an adequate answer at all for three reasons.

First, the tribe of Simeon is a parallel case. Simeon didn't get a state with boundaries either. In the map that I put into your outlines I mistakenly put a rounded area labeled Simeon that sort of seems like Simeon gets land, but that tribe did not. That circle is just where most of its cities were. We saw last week that they *only* inherited cities, and their cities were under *Judah's* jurisdiction. Simeon's cities were considered to be *Judah's* cities. They were assimilated *into* Judah just as God had promised would happen when God made Jacob prophesy over his sons. So *both* Simeon and Levi were scattered among the other tribes of Israel, and both of them (*at the most*) inherited cities. Otherwise they were just individually scattered. Yet both Simeon and Levi are spoken of repeatedly as being *two of the twelve tribes* all the way through the Old Testament and even as late as Revelation 7. The phrase, "the tribe of Levi" occurs a bunch of times (Numb. 1:49; 3:6; 18:2; Deut. 10:8; 18:1; Josh 13:14,33; 1 Chron. 23:14; Rev. 7:7) as does the phrase "the tribe of Simeon" (Numb. 1:23; 2:12; 13:5; Josh 21:4; Rev. 7:7).

Second, the "twelve tribes" are listed in Genesis 49, and yet Levi is listed as being one of those twelve tribes. The same is true of the listing of the twelve tribes in Ezekiel 48.¹ Levi is there. The same is true of the listing of twelve tribes in Revelation 7. So it simply not true that Levi is not one of the twelve tribes. It is *enumerated* as one of the twelve tribes all the way up to Revelation 7.

Third, Gangel and Bramer point out (and I am quoting them here),

In the twenty-nine lists of the tribes of Israel found in the Old and New Testaments, never are more than twelve names listed. Often it is the name of Levi

¹ See "twelve tribes" in Ezek. 47:13 introducing the list, and then see the long description of Levi's property in chapter 48:9-22.

that is missing, although the tribe of Dan that became so idolatrous is left out on occasion.²

For example, Dan was left out of the listing of twelve tribes in 1 Chronicles 6 and Revelation 7. And interestingly, in Revelation 7 Manasseh and Joseph are listed as two separate tribes even though Manasseh is one of the sons of Joseph. That's very deliberate. So the name Joseph must represent the other son, Ephraim, but by saying Manasseh and Joseph he is making clear that they *are* separate tribes. There is no getting around it.

And this has been a head-scratcher for those scholars who insist on being literalists, rather than taking the number twelve as being symbolic (as I do, and as most commentators do). So the literalists in Revelation 7 (who tend to be the Dispensationalists) insist that Dan was not mentioned in *that* particular list because that tribe had ceased to exist by the time of the New Testament. Sorry, that doesn't work either. Scholars point out that it can't be the answer because Ezekiel prophecies of the *same* city in the *same* period of time and lists Dan as being in the *same* city of God, and as having one of its gates named "Dan" so that the tribe of Dan could enter and exit through that gate (Ezekiel 48:32). So Danites must be around during that same time period. And there is a lot of other evidence that forces us to the conclusion that the number twelve was always intended to be a symbolic number, not a literal number. Wilcock says,

The fact of the matter is that the Bible, which often lists the sons, or tribes, of Israel, does so in a number of different ways. It has been reckoned that there are no fewer than seventeen variations in the order of the names. Further, there is no uniformity as to which names are put in and which left out. One factor, however, is almost invariable... [the number] twelve.³

B. The symbolic meaning of twelve

I am spending this much time on the background to help explain that the Bible forces us to see the number twelve as being a symbolic number. Though Joshua has earlier called Joseph's two sons "two tribes" in Joshua 14:4, he does something unique in these chapters in order to maintain the perfect number twelve. Beginning with Matthew Henry,⁴ many commentators believe that he calls Manasseh and Ephraim half-tribes (though admittedly, there is controversy on that). So what in the world is going on?

² Kenneth O. Gangel and Stephen J. Bramer, *Genesis*, ed. Max Anders, *Holman Old Testament Commentary* (B&H Publishing Group, 2002), 378.

³ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Chronicles: One Church, One Faith, One Lord*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball,* *The Bible Speaks Today** (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 39–40. See also *NIV Bible Speaks Today: Notes* (London: IVP, 2020), 535.

⁴ "Manasseh was but half of the tribe of Joseph, yet it was divided into two parts." Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Jos 17:1.

Most commentaries agree that the number twelve is clearly *symbolic* in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Concerning the New Testament, Ryken says,

The significance of twelve carries over into the NT. Jesus appointed twelve apostles (Mk 3:14), probably as a symbol of the restoration of Israel. Similar symbolism is probably intended in the gathering up of the twelve baskets of fragments following the feeding of the five thousand (Mk 6:43; 8:19). Jesus' promise that the Twelve would someday sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30) probably had to do with his desire to restore Israel. James's reference to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion (Jas 1:1) in all probability reflects similar thinking.

The symbolism of twelve appears frequently in the book of Revelation. Twelve thousand persons from each of the twelve tribes of Israel are sealed, totaling 144,000 in all (Rev 7:5–8). The woman (= Israel) who gives birth to the child (= Jesus) is crowned with “twelve stars,” probably an allusion to the twelve tribes (Rev 12:1–2). The new Jerusalem, which will descend from heaven (Rev 21:1–4), is rich with symbolism, much of which revolves around the number twelve. The eschatological city will have twelve gates, twelve angels as gatekeepers, and the names of the twelve tribes written on the gates (Rev 21:12). We are told that these gates are twelve pearls (Rev 21:21). The wall of the city will rest on twelve foundations, on which will be inscribed the names of the twelve apostles (Rev 21:14). The city will be twelve thousand stadia square (Rev 21:16). Finally, the tree of life, an image that surely is meant to recall the tree of life that once stood in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:9; 3:22), will stand in the city and bear twelve kinds of fruit every month, for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2).⁵

When all of its uses are collated, three ideas come together to give us the symbolic meaning of the number 12 - the idea of fullness or completeness⁶ the idea of God's *organization* of

⁵ Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 901.

⁶ Cory says, “Twelve = fullness or completeness, especially bringing diversity into unity. Israel was made up of twelve tribes. The calendar year consists of twelve months, and the day has two sets of twelve hours.” Catherine A. Cory, “The Book of Revelation,” in *New Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken, *The New Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 834. Kistemaker says, “the number twelve exemplifies perfection.” Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, vol. 20, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 14. Philo (*On Rewards and Punishments* 65) says that the number twelve points not only to Israel, but that it is “the perfect number.”

that fullness and completeness⁷ and the idea of the fullness or completeness of the *people of God*.⁸ All three are wrapped up in that number. So McKnight says,

Over and over in the Old Testament twelve means the covenant people of God in their fullness or in their totality. One is not far from the truth in saying that twelve is an ecclesial (or church) term more than it is a prophetic or an eschatological term.⁹

C. Significance of “twelve apostles” (Matt. 10:12; Luke 22:14; Rev. 21:14)

Thus, when Jesus set apart twelve apostles, most commentaries agree that Jesus was establishing a new Israel *out of* the old Israel.¹⁰ you’ve got to realize that the church started off as being 100% Jewish. It was literally the New Israel. As Ming Gao words it,

⁷ See Bob Utley, *The Patriarchal Period: Genesis 12-50, Study Guide Commentary Series* (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2009), 153-154, 367.

⁸ Prévost, *How to Read the Apocalypse*, 32. See Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 36; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 64. Dalrymple says, “twelve represents completion and totality, especially in regard to the people of God.” Rob Dalrymple, *Follow the Lamb: A Guide to Reading, Understanding, and Applying the Book of Revelation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 79.

⁹ Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 107.

¹⁰ Twelftree says, “Jesus created the Twelve—a symbolic action inaugurating the eschatological regathering of the twelve tribes of the people of God—the very notion of mission inheres in their institution.” Graham H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 49–50. Hafemann says, “Jesus gathered around himself a group of precisely twelve disciples who symbolized the eschatological regathering of the twelve tribes of Israel.” Scott J. Hafemann, *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 133. Gao says, “Thus, the sending of the twelve apostles symbolizes the eschatological regathering of the twelve tribes of Israel.” Ming Gao, *Heaven and Earth in Luke-Acts* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2017), 97. See also the discussion by Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3:148–54. Cf. Scot McKnight, “Jesus and the Twelve,” *BBR* 11 (2001): 203–31; John P. Meier, “Jesus, the Twelve, and the Restoration of Israel,” in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (ed. James M. Scott; *JSJSup* 72; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 365–404.

...the sending of the twelve apostles symbolizes the eschatological regathering of the twelve tribes of Israel. While the number twelve denotes the nation of Israel, the number seventy... symbolizes all the nations of the world. ¹¹

Who, by the way, will eventually be gathered into the New Israel as well - as those nations become converted. Revelation will make clear that both Jew and Gentile are included in the New Israel. Of course, we have seen earlier in Joshua that Jew and Gentile were included in the Old Israel too. Caleb had Gentile background - as did a number of the citizens of Israel in that generation.

1. Even after Judas lost his place Jesus “was seen...by the twelve” (1 Cor. 15:5). Why “twelve” when there were only eleven at that point?

So it is significant that even though all the harmonies of the Gospels that I own show that Judas hanged himself *before* Jesus was crucified,¹² thus leaving only eleven living apostles, and even though Matthias was not selected to replace Judas until Acts chapter 1, Paul says the just-resurrected-Jesus “was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve” prior to Acts 1 (1 Corinthians 15:5). Huh! Even though there were eleven, they are still symbolically designated as “the twelve.”

2. Paul and Barnabas were added (Acts 14:14) and possibly James (Gal. 1:19),¹³ yet God still numbers the apostles as being only “twelve apostles” in Revelation 21:14. There must be some significance to the number twelve.

Likewise, Paul and Barnabas were designated as being among the apostles (Acts 14:14) and (depending on how you interpret the Greek)¹⁴ possibly even James the brother of Jesus was

¹¹ Ming Gao, *Heaven and Earth in Luke-Acts* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2017), 97.

¹² See Johnston M. Cheney, *The Life of Christ in Stereo* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1969), p. 193. Loraine Boettner, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Nutley, NJ: 1976), pp. 114-115. Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr. *Gospel Parallels* (Nashville, TN: 1936), p. 176. Stevens & Burton, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York, NY: Silver Burdett & Company, 1902), pp. 199-200; Ralph D. Heim, *A Harmon of the Gospels* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1947), p. 122; etc.

¹³ Though as many commentators point out, the Greek could go two ways, one of which makes him an apostle and the other of which excludes him from being an apostle

¹⁴ David deSilva says, “The Greek of 1:19 admits of two possible renderings: (1) “I did not see any others of the apostles, but I did see James (whom I do not enumerate among the apostles)” or (2) “I did not see any others of the apostles except James (whom I thereby enumerate among the apostles).” The second reading is a far more natural construal of the Greek, especially the typical sense of the conjunction rendered “except,” and more in keeping with Paul’s open acknowledgment elsewhere of James as a witness of the risen

said to be an apostle in Galatians 1:19 (though there is huge controversy on how to translate that verse). Paul speaks of himself as being an apostle born out of due time, and just as the other apostles were trained by Jesus for three years, Paul was trained by Christ for three years in Arabia. Yet God still numbers the apostles in Revelation 21:14 as being “the twelve apostles.” On *everyone’s* enumeration, there are more than twelve apostles, but they are consistently spoken of as “the twelve.” It says about the New Jerusalem, “Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

The point is, most people agree that the phrase “the twelve apostles” is just as symbolic as the phrase “the twelve tribes” is. It speaks to the leaders of the New Israel (the church), which consists of the fullness of the people of God.

3. These 13+ (or 12) apostles form the foundation of the church, with Jesus being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20)

But there is more. According to Ephesians 2:20, those twelve apostles form the foundation of the church (just like Revelation 21 says), with Jesus being the chief cornerstone. And that church did not leave out the Old Testament saints. The New Jerusalem in Revelation has the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the gates of the city and the names of the twelve apostles on the twelve foundations of the city - *but its only one city*. That’s Revelation 21:12-14. There is a unity of the people of God in that imagery from Genesis to Revelation. There are not two people’s of God; there is only one. That’s the key application. And there are serious theological and practical problems when Dispensationalists insist that there are two peoples of God instead of one and that God has two eternal purposes on earth instead of one.

Now, I realize that that’s maybe a longer explanation than you may have wanted of why thirteen tribes are called twelve tribes and why these chapters use one of 17 different ways of squeezing thirteen into twelve. It parallels why the New Israel, the church, also has twelve apostles even though there were technically more.

And I won’t say more on that question. I’ve probably said too much already - at least for some of you. But twelve stands for the fullness of God’s people. He is a covenant-keeping God from Genesis to Revelation, and the only way *any* people can be a people of God is by union with Jesus. It’s the same Gospel in both Testaments.

Now with that as a background, let’s dive into the text. If there is one people of God, there *must* be applications we can garner from this text.

Christ and, by implication from his placement within a list of apostles and apostolic groups (1 Cor 15:3–9), an apostle himself—at least, no more and no less than Cephas or Paul in that company (vv. 5–9).” David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 160–161.

II. Joseph, the eleventh child of Jacob, comes second in the distribution of the land (v. 1)

Verse 1 says, “The lot fell to the children of Joseph...” Joseph was the eleventh child of Jacob, yet Joseph’s children are the *second* ones to get the distribution of the land. That would seem strange to the Jews of that day. Normally the firstborn got the double inheritance. But because of Joseph’s faithfulness to the Lord, *Joseph* got the double portion. And it was both a *massive* inheritance and a rich and fertile inheritance. Campbell says, “Their territory in Canaan was in many respects the most beautiful and fertile.”¹⁵ God’s allotments don’t always seem fair. They probably didn’t seem fair to the rest of the tribes who had tiny allotments compared to Judah and Joseph. But this teaches us that we need to trust that God knows what he is doing rather than to envy what others have.

But beyond the lesson of avoiding envy, there is a second application. In Genesis 48-49 God not only promised to profoundly bless Joseph with rich blessings in the land, but He also gave four promises that He would make Joseph more fruitful than any of the other tribe,¹⁶ despite the fact that Joseph had a late start and only had two children. We will see in chapter 17 that Joseph’s descendants were by far the most numerous (when you take Ephraim and Manasseh together).¹⁷ At the second census just before they entered the land, the total adult males among Joseph’s descendants was 85,200 compared to Judah’s population of 76,500 (which was itself far bigger than the census of any of the other ten tribes). And Joseph (especially his son Ephraim) kept multiplying and multiplying

¹⁵ Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 358–359.

¹⁶ Symbolized by the fruitful branches of the vine that would spread over the wall (Gen. 49:22) and the literal “blessings of the breast and of the womb” (Gen. 49:25), and the promises “I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people” (Gen. 48:4) and “let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (48:16).

¹⁷ Though Judah was slightly more in the first census of adults males in Numbers 1 (Judah at 74,600, Ephraim at 40,500, and Manasseh at 32,200), at the second census of Numbers 26 Judah was 76,500, Manasseh was 52,700, and Ephraim was 32,500, making Joseph 85,200. Fruchtenbaum says, “Thus the Tribe of Joseph will become the largest tribe because it developed into two tribes, and united they were the largest: Ephraim and Manasseh.” Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 1st ed. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2008), 651. Francisco says that later, Ephraim became the largest: “Thus the prominent place of the Ephraim tribe in North Israel (it became the largest tribe) was traced back to Jacob’s deathbed.” Clyde T. Francisco, “Genesis,” in *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1972), 50.

exponentially - much faster than the others, just as God had promised that he would in Genesis.

The faithfulness of Joseph during times of difficulty brought incredible blessings to his descendants. In terms of land allocation, Joseph got the largest portion and probably the best. God was super generous to Joseph's descendants.

And hopefully this will be a motivation to you parents (and even to those of you who are singles like Joseph was for a long time) to be faithful to the Lord during difficult times, knowing that your *current* faithfulness in the midst of sacrifice can have a huge positive impact on your descendants. Don't just look at the difficulties of maintaining righteousness now; have a long-range perspective of what God will produce hundreds of years from now in your descendants. Yes, *you* individually can have a huge impact on that outcome. That's the kind of future-orientation you should maintain. If you do, it will make the sacrifices you are now making seem totally worthwhile.

So to summarize both chapters - Joseph's second son, Ephraim, will have his portion allocated in chapter 16 and Joseph's first son, Manasseh, will have his portion allocated in chapter 17. The rest of the tribes will have to wait to get their inheritance, requiring patience. God deliberately set it up in a way where there would have to be patience.

III. Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim, yet he patiently waits for his inheritance even though he was a leader

But the next point shows that Joshua *himself* modeled patience and humility to everyone. Even though he came from the tribe of Ephraim and he *could* have gotten his land right away in this chapter like the rest of the Ephraimites did, Joshua deliberately waited till everyone else got their land before he had his family settle into his own personal inheritance. Joshua is a model of patience and he did not push for his own rights ahead of others. Spence-Jones says,

He [Joshua] was first in service, last in reward. The true Christian spirit will put self last. He who is rightly devoted to duty will not seek for his reward before his task is completed.¹⁸

And since he was the leader, his task would not be completed until *everyone* was settled. And interestingly, even *then*, he didn't take the land for himself. Instead, the people offered him a super-generous portion for the leadership that he had provided. They were not stingy with him. But he *waited* for that.

¹⁸ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Joshua, The Pulpit Commentary* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 289.

Our politicians today could learn from Joshua. He did not use his position to gain personal advantage over others. He did not tyrannically use his authority to enrich himself. On the other hand, we will see in chapter 19 that the people did richly reward him with good land.

In any case, I see Joshua as a model public servant. He served God first and foremost, served the people that he led second, and served himself last. And God rewards those who are humble in doing so. I think Joshua is a wonderful role model for us. Leadership means humble self-sacrificing service. Don't even think of being a leader unless you have humble self-sacrificing service. Dads, that's what you are called to. Deacons and elders, that's what we are called to.

IV. God is the one who sovereignly determines the time and the extent of the blessings for each of Joseph's sons ("lot" - v. 1). In this case, Ephraim (the second-born) is served first (chapter 16) and Manasseh (the firstborn) is served second (chapter 17). See Genesis 48:12-22.

But let's move on to the next point. I've commented on the word "lot" in a previous sermon so I won't say a lot on it today. We saw in chapter 15 that the lot spoke to God's sovereignty. And I will assume that you remember that. Part of that sovereignty can be seen in the fact that Ephraim got its land before Manasseh did.

Why is that odd? Well, Manasseh was the firstborn, so one would think that Manasseh should have received his portion first. And that is the way Joseph *intended* his father Jacob to do it. When Joseph brought his sons to Jacob to be prophetically blessed by his father in Genesis 48, his father couldn't see well. So Joseph deliberately put his firstborn son Manasseh near his father's right hand and Ephraim near his left hand. The text in Genesis 48 says that his father (Jacob) knowingly crossed his hands and put his right hand awkwardly on Ephraim's head. Joseph was upset with this and tried to guide his father's right hand back to Manasseh's head, saying, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." But the text goes on to say,

But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!'" And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

Jacob had finally learned that God alone is the author of blessing, and we cannot manipulate Him, and Jacob's earlier attempts to circumvent God's sovereignty did not pay off. Joseph needs to learn the same thing. God is the Sovereign, and we need to submit to Him when He puts His greater blessing on others.

V. Miscellaneous other lessons from chapter 16.

There are a number of other lessons in chapter 16, and I will go through them fairly quickly.

A. Descriptions of Joseph

First the names related to Joseph's family take on meaning when you consider the sufferings that Joseph had to endure from his brothers and that he had to endure in his early years in Egypt.

1. The name "Joseph" means "he shall add." Though God took almost everything away from Joseph in his early years, He added so much more to Joseph as Joseph maintained his faith in God. *When God was Joseph's supreme focus, God trusted him with more.* That's the point. And when God takes good things away from you, don't give up. Look to God in faith just as Joseph did and you will eventually discover incredibly good purposes come out of all that God takes away. And over time you will realize that God always adds more than He takes away. It may not seem like it when you are forgotten in a prison like Joseph was, but God does add. You can bank on it.
2. Second, in verse 4 God gives the names in the birth order to make it obvious that the inheritance of the land was about to be reversed in order. It's a very deliberate juxtaposition. So we will examine each name in the birth order. Joseph named his firstborn son "Manasseh," which means "causing me to forget." He explained the meaning of the name saying, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household" (Gen. 41:51). God's rich blessings in Joseph's life helped him to forget the horrible experiences that he had gone through growing up. And God can do the same for us. It is important that we not become bitter over life's unfairness, but that we learn to release the past and step into God's future-blessings by faith like Joseph had learned to do.
3. Third, Joseph named his second son, "Ephraim." The dictionary defines that literally as "double land" or "twin land" (the "im" on Ephraim referring to that duality) but it metaphorically means "double fruitfulness." And that seems to be the way Joseph mainly intended it, because he explained the name, saying, "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction" (Gen. 41:52). But either way, whether double-land or double-fruitfulness, his name was a prophetic statement about the future of Joseph's descendants. They would get a double portion in the land and they would be very fruitful. This was a statement of faith concerning the future since Joseph didn't have any more children after Ephraim. Yet God multiplied him exceedingly. And He can multiply the little that *you* have like Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fish.

B. God gave those blessings to Joseph based on God's faithfulness to His Word.

I may have already mentioned the next lesson, but all these blessings that Ephraim and Manasseh got, they got because God *promised* those blessings, and God never forgets His promises. *We* might forget God's promises, but *He* does not. And this is why I try to encourage people to memorize the promises of the Bible that relate to *your* situations. Trust God to be a promise-keeping God.

C. The importance of land (vv. 1-8)

Another lesson could have been given in any of these chapters, and that is that God considers land to be super-important. And this balances what I said about cities last week. Verses 1-8 is God's second gift of land to His people. I love what Dale Davis said about this when commenting on *Judah's* allotment in the previous chapter - but I think it applies here as well. He said,

We western Christians probably need to get a hard grip on this; we need to rediscover the earthiness of God. We must realise that even enjoying the grand act of the kingdom of God will not mean floating as a beeping soul in some sort of spiritual ether but walking around with a resurrection body in new heavens and a new earth (cf. Isa. 65-66; Rev. 21-22).¹⁹

Gnostics wanted to abandon their bodies, and they tried to ignore the physical world as being unimportant, and they tried to focus only on what they considered to be "spiritual," and by "spiritual" they mean "invisible." But we have already seen that that is a misuse of the term "spiritual." We have seen in the past that *everything* in life can be spiritual if the Spirit of God is giving it to you and is blessing it. That includes your house, your yard, or if you are a farmer, your land. Land is important to God and it should be important to us. We love the 1.3 acre plot of land that God has given to us.

And if land is important to God, then it means that we need to steward it well and make the most of our land. Letting land go to wilderness (as the conservationists want us to do) is considered a *curse* by God. He does not consider unused wilderness to be a blessing. He considers it to be a curse. God made man *for* the land.

On the other hand, abusing the land by turning it toxic is also wrong. The Dominion Mandate calls us to steward the land.

And the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation has a lot of fantastic material that deals with how best to steward the land. In fact, on March 19 they have a new major book coming out that will expose the lies of the politically correct on this hot topic. Pray for

¹⁹ Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 124.

them. The left hates them. The Cornwall Alliance have come under cyber attacks, slander, and relentless persecution, but I praise God for their presence and their ministry.

D. Why Ephraim and Manasseh shared cities on their borders (v. 9)

One curious fact in this chapter that some might have questions about is why verse 9 says that Ephraim and Manasseh shared cities on their borders - or, as some take it, some of Ephraim's cities resided *within* Manasseh. It says, "The separate cities for the children of Ephraim were among the inheritance of the children of Manasseh, all the cities with their villages." He doesn't name the cities, but either Ephraim owned cities within Manasseh or there was an overlap.

Obviously we have that in America as well, where some cities straddle both sides of state borders. In any case, some commentators say that this may have been designed to maintain a brotherly tribal unity between these two groups. Others suggest that it may have been a deal worked out by those inhabiting the cities because they preferred to be under one jurisdiction or another. Others just say that it was simply geography that dictated the overlap. Whichever theory is correct, it speaks to the importance of inter-tribal cooperation. States within Israel were not supposed to be in competition with each other, but were supposed to seek the welfare of *their* citizens *without damaging the welfare of the neighboring state*. I think our church models well that Iowans and Nebraskans can get along pretty well - until it comes to football.

E. Why were most of the cities of Ephraim not even mentioned?

Another question is, "Why were most of the cities of Ephraim *not even mentioned*?" This stands in such stark contrast to chapter 15 that it is impossible to miss. There were 122 cities mentioned in Judah, and hardly any mentioned in this chapter or in connection with *other* tribes. There are two possibilities for this strange omission. One is that the lessons related to the cities that God wanted *us* to know only needed to be mentioned once. The other possibility might be that Judah was the leading state and much more detail was devoted to its description than to the rest. I tend to think it was both reasons, but *especially* the first reason. Since the relationship of cities, towns, villages, and farms has already been so clearly laid out in chapter 15, why bother listing the cities of other tribes in order to teach that lesson again?

F. Shiloh

But there is *one* city that *is* very significant. It is the city in verse six called "Taanath-Shiloh" and later simply shortened to Shiloh. When almost no cities are mentioned, we ought to ask why *this* one was. In chapter 18 we will find that the tabernacle of the Lord was set up in Shiloh and remained in Shiloh during the whole period of the Judges and partway into king David's reign.

This was one of the blessings given to Joseph in Genesis 49. Though Judah will much later have the blessing of God's presence dwelling in their midst at *Jerusalem*, Jacob prophesied that God's meeting place would be in *Ephraim*. (See "Joseph = Ephraim in Revelation 7.") Genesis 49:24 says about Ephraim, "From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel" (with

Shepherd and Stone being capitalized because it is referring to God Himself). God's glory cloud would visibly reside over the tabernacle in Shiloh, and God would shepherd His people from there until He would authorize the change to Jerusalem under David.

So this was yet *another* blessing that God bestowed upon his faithful servant Joseph. He would honor his descendants by having His glory cloud residing in their midst for hundreds of years. I am so thankful that in the New Covenant *all of us* can experience the reality of God's personal presence with us. His glory can reside within us. But it was certainly a blessing to Ephraim.

G. They didn't drive out the Canaanites (v. 10)

But there is *one* sad note in this chapter. It is in verse 10, which says, "And they did not drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites to this day and have become forced laborers." Notice that it doesn't say that they *could* not drive them out. Rather it says that they *did* not drive them out. Further, it is obvious that if they were *able* to turn them into forced laborers (which they *were*), they *should* have been able to drive them out or destroy them as God commanded. So why did they not do so? A pastor once suggested to me four possible reasons.²⁰ And I thought they were at least worth considering.

1. His first suggestion was that since most of the land had already been taken, what difference would it make to leave a few obscure Canaanites alone? They were no danger anymore, and it would be an inconvenience to continue fighting. But if we fail to do God's will because it is *inconvenient* to do so, we will eventually suffer. These Canaanites will later become a thorn in their side. Throw the excuse of inconvenience out the window. Inconvenience should never be in our vocabulary as an excuse for disobedience.
2. The second possible reason was financial gain. They might have thought, "Hey. Instead of killing them, why not profit from their labor? Let's put them to work. It would be a waste to not do so. After all, these Canaanites are begging for their lives and seem quite willing to work for us rather than to be killed. If we can *make a profit* by keeping them alive, why not?" But worldly gain at the expense of obeying God's commands will always come back to haunt us - often with our children taking our compromises much further than we did. And that's exactly what happened in the book of Judges.
3. A third possible reason was that these Canaanites were no longer a *threat*. There was nothing to *fear* from them anymore. But when feelings contradict God's Word, we should ignore our feelings. Feelings are never a reliable guide; God's Word is.

²⁰ I failed to record in my notes which pastor I took these notes from.

4. The fourth possible reason was that they perhaps felt that they could eventually win these people over to their side. If that was the case, it was a false hope. What *actually* happened in the first chapters of Judges is that the Canaanites influenced the believers negatively rather than the Ephraimites influencing the Canaanites positively.

Of course, we aren't *told* the reason why they chose to put them to forced labor rather than killing them as God commanded. It may have been only one of the reasons or all four reasons or a totally different reason. But the bottom line is that it *was* a compromise, and all compromises eventually cost us. In their case, it wasn't the *parents* who initially *felt* the cost; it was their *children*. This is how sneaky Satan can be - Satan doesn't make us feel the cost of our compromises immediately. In fact, sometimes giving in to compromise feels a *lot* better. But down the road our children or our children's children will feel the pain - just as theirs did in the book of Judges.

So this chapter presents us with the incredible blessings God poured out on Ephraim and Manasseh, and it ends with the compromise that would eventually lead the Israelites to cry out to God in anguish as they began to experience the tyranny of the Canaanites, whose influence eventually became pervasive.

That's what has happened in America. God built this nation and richly blessed this nation, but because our nation gradually forgot God's law, and refused to apply the Gospel to education, culture, and civics, this nation's godly influence began to be undermined to the point where *now* the Canaanites dominate the entire country and it is tough to take it back - not impossible, but tough. America is experiencing the period of the Judges - which, by the way, shows that it is not a hopeless cause. In any case, small compromises can lead to large consequences. May we learn from this verse by faithfully obeying all God's commandments, doing so by grace, and to His glory, and receiving His blessings by faith. Amen.